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ARGENTINA: Move Against Labor

The Argentine military government has taken a major step in its national reorganization plan with the recent announcement of a new law to regulate trade union activities. 3.5(c)

The law is an ambitious attempt to break the political and economic power of organized labor--the backbone of Peronism. In its broad outlines, the law prohibits all political activities by the unions, removes from trade union control the administration of social welfare services--the source of labor's vast economic power--and dissolves the General Confederation of Labor, the Peronist-dominated national labor confederation. The procedural details of the decree will not be announced for another four months, and the new statute is not expected to take effect for another year. 3.5(c)

Reaction in trade union circles was immediate and negative. The United Leadership of Argentine Workers, a government-sponsored successor to the Peronist confederation, rejected the edict and said its member unions would refuse to implement it. Labor's opposition to the law, for the present at least, will not include general strikes because the new organization is too weak and faction-ridden to carry them out. Instead, it will employ appeals to the international labor organizations, extensive court tests, and attempts to rally support from the domestic labor sector and the general public. 3.5(c)

The government seems determined to implement the new law, which it deems essential in effecting the sweeping political, social, and economic changes necessary to overcome the recurrent cycle of ineffectual and corrupt civilian governments followed by military intervention. 3.5(c)

Labor's traditional strength in Argentine political institutions, however, will be difficult to break. The military may be forced to relent on some of the law's harsher provisions in order to secure labor support when it implements the return to civilian rule some time in the mid-1980s. 3.5(c)

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